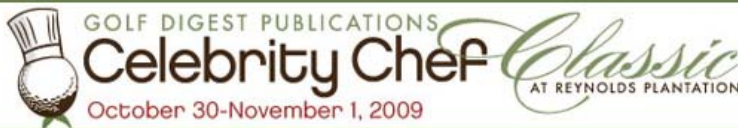


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The Real Winner of the Tour de France? Chalkbot

By Dave Banks | July 21, 2009 | 7:00 am | Categories: [Electronic Geek](#), [Science and Education](#), [Toys and Technology](#)

The Tour de France will be winding up this week, after more than three weeks of high winds and even higher mountains. The granddaddy of all bike races has entered the final stages and - sadly - it looks like Lance Armstrong's comeback will fall short of a top podium spot on the Champs-Élysées.

But a robot attached to Armstrong's cancer charity, [Livestrong](#), is making a big impact at this year's race. The robot, affectionately known as Chalkbot, has been taking the age-old Tour tradition of writing messages on the road to new levels. This wonderful piece of technology uses 48 nozzles that spray an emulsified chalk on the street. (Watch the embedded video to learn more about how Chalkbot works.) These messages offer words of support for Tour riders, honor for cancer survivors and more. While Chalkbot is [similar to previous projects](#) used by artists and activists, it is still fun to see robotics in action - especially at major sporting events.

By tour's end, Nike & Livestrong believe they will have chalked more than 100,000 messages on the roads, avenues and highways of France (and Monaco, Spain and Switzerland). But there's still time to participate - [text](#) or [twitter](#) your message to be chalked onto the roads of the final stages today!



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Posted by: rapplec | 07/21/09 | 8:53 am

Chalkbot's great, but what it's doing on the Tour de France isn't universally popular. It's been seen by many people as the McDonalds-isation of a parochial and traditional activity carried out by those who actually go to the trouble of attending the event in person to cheer the riders on. To put it another way, how many Americans would like a bunch of French people to be able to remotely write messages on American roads? Don't even get me started on why it is far from sad that Lance won't win this year. The cause he represents is great, his motives for riding again however are less than altruistic. This man aims to be a force in American politics before the end of the next decade.

Posted by: hackneyshire | 07/21/09 | 12:08 pm

I'm with Rapplec. The messages on the roads by fans are a real part of le tour and there's something special about the way they link fans of the riders with the race. I love seeing them, even months after le tour has gone by.

What the Armstrong publicity machine is doing is not the same and has, in my view at least, diminished the tour as a result. It is little more than advertising - albeit in a very worthy cause - and there is something rather distasteful about that.

Like many Europeans I won't be sad if Armstrong doesn't win, far from it. His motives this time around are questionable at best...

Posted by: technophile | 07/22/09 | 9:27 am

Not all of us can travel to chalk our own messages of support. The Livestrong organization is giving a voice to the millions of cancer patients and survivors who aren't there. So what if Lance has aspirations? Who doesn't? Aspirations make things happen. I'm quite sure that if he were not as competitive as he is, then he wouldn't have those SEVEN wins.

Lance probably will not win this year, and Tiger didn't make the cut last week, big deal. The fact that he is riding again for the 27.5 million people that died from cancer during those 3 years that he was off is enough of a victory for a lot of us. And he's brought cycling to a new level in the US. Lance bashing is very fashionable (especially in France), but sorry kids, it's not sticking.

In my mind, it's all good.

And whoever wins the Tour deserves it, it's a brutal challenge and well earned. Cheers!

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